

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2820

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMCONSUL PERTH

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL PORT MORESBY

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION GENEVA

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TAGS PINT, AS

SUBJ: BASS TASMANIA BY-ELECTION: INTERIM REPORT

1. ON EVE OF IMPORTANT BY-ELECTION CAUSED BY RESIGNATION FORMER MINISTER OF DEFENSE LANCE BARNARD FROM ISLAND DISTRICT INCLUDING CITY OF LAUNCESTON, CONGEN SPOKE WITH MAX CLEAVER, LAUNCESTON BUSINESSMAN AND LONG TIME LIBERAL PARTY STALWART. CLEAVER REPORTS HIS PARTY'S CANDIDATE, EX-LT COL KEVIN NEWMAN, IS PROVIDING TO BE GOOD CAMPAIGNER AND THAT LOCAL LIBERAL PARTY ORGANIZATION HAS "NEVER WORKED SO HARD." CLEAVER ALSO COMMENTED VERY FAVORABLY ON HUSTINGS PERFORMANCE OF OPPOSITION LEADER MALCOLM FRASER. HIS HIGH REGARD FOR LIBERAL LEADER SEEMS TO BE GENERALLY REFLECTED IN ALL LEADING MEDIA. AT SAME TIME CLEAVER RELUCTANTLY ADMITS THAT LABOR CANDIDATE, JOHN
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MACROSTIE, IS SHOWING GREAT IMPROVEMENT AS HE HAS BEEN "PUT

THROUGH CHARM SCHOOL" BY LABOR PARTY CAMPAIGN OPERATORS.

2. DURING TELEPHONE CONVERSATION EARLIER IN WEEK, DOUGLAS LOWE, CHIEF SECRETARY AND MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT IN TASMANIA, TOLD CONGEN THAT ALP EXPECTS CLOSE RACE BUT LOOKS FOR MINIMUM 750 VOTES MARGIN. UNDERLINING LOCAL DISSATISFACTION OVER FEDERAL LABOR PARTY INTERVENTION IN LOCAL CAMPAIGN, LOWE COMMENTED SOURLY THAT CANDIDACY OF MACROSTIE WILL COST PARTY MORE THAN 1,000 VOTES WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN CASE FOR ALMOST ANY OTHER ALP CANDIDATE.

3. IN CONVERSATION WITH CONGEN SAME DAY BILL BEATTIE, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION IN TASMANIA AND NEWMAN'S CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR, SAID HE THOUGHT THINGS WERE GOING VERY WELL. BEATTIE HAS NEVER SEEN SO MUCH INTEREST IN AN ELECTION. BEATTIE CONFIRMED GENERAL CONSENSUS THAT NEWMAN IS TURNING OUT TO BE "VERY GOOD CANDIDATE" AND THAT "LABOR COULD HAVE SELECTED A BETTER CANDIDATE." BEATTIE WENT ON TO SAY " IF WE DON'T MAKE ANY FALSE MOVES BEFORE SATURDAY, WE WILL WIN."

4. COMMENT: CONGEN AND LABAT NOTE WITH INTEREST DIFFICULTY IN GETTING FLAT STATEMENT IN PRIVATE FROM EITHER PARTY THAT RACE IS BETTER THAN 50-50. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM WHO IS PRESENTLY TRUNDLING PORK BARREL WIDELY THROUGH DISTRICT ON WEEK-LONG CAMPAIGN, HAS SO FAR PROMISED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FEDERAL PROJECTS IN DISTRICT RUNNING TO A\$500,000. NEWMAN SUPPORTERS HOPE THAT TASMANIAN ELECTORATE WILL TAKE THE MONEY BUT VOTE LIBERAL.
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